This Is Al-Jazeera

By Steven P. Carney, Colonel, USA

***Editorial Abstract:** COL Carney examines the history and political context of modern Arab satellite television. He describes distinctions in presentation style, delivery, and tone between Arab and Western TV news, and how these differences can affect audience perception in all parts of the world.*

"Reporting from Qatar, this is Al-Jazeera."

The station identification is continually heard each day in the smoky shee-shas, hookah bars, coffee houses, cafés, or Arab living rooms throughout all 22 nations in the Middle East. This distinctly Arabic 24 hour a day, seven day a week television news station also reaches most countries in Europe, plus the United States and Canada. As satellite companies throughout the world continue to expand services, many will include Al-Jazeera in their broadcast schedules.

Since it began in November 1996, the former Qatari state-run turned independent pan-Arabic station has been characterized by noted political cartoonist, Ahmed Toughan, as "the big voice from a tiny country."[1] Al-Jazeera speaks directly to the man and woman on the Muslim and Arab street. Through the vision of the new Emir, the tiny Gulf peninsula country of Qatar subsequently defined the term "Arab street" through the use of satellite television, and consequently gained international recognition. Al-Jazeera appealed to the Arab and Muslim populace as it said what many were already thinking but were not allowed to hear due to the predominance of state-controlled media in the Middle East. Moreover, it turned the boring and mundane Middle Eastern state controlled media apparatus on its head, reporting on taboo subjects never before addressed in the Arab media. Indeed, Al-Jazeera's unprecedented style changed the complexion of news reporting in the Middle East, and promoted the hypothesis of a free and open press in a previously censored and controlled region of the world.

Al-Jazeera home page. (Al-Jazeera.net)

Al-Jazeera also sparked the concept of a public debate played on the Arab street via satellite airwaves, plus struck down the notion that an independent Arab news network could not survive and flourish in the Arab world. Noted New York Times columnist and best-selling author Thomas Friedman referred to Al-Jazeera as a "beacon of freedom and the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world." Almost overnight, Al-Jazeera became a lightning rod for controversy due to unfiltered editorial opinions levied against many of the policies enforced by most Middle Eastern countries. It also received admonishments from Middle Eastern countries during Operation Desert Fox and the second Palestinian intifada for openly attacking countries Al-Jazeera deemed less than committed to the Arab cause. The US and British governments outwardly rebuked Al-Jazeera for its negative style of reporting at the beginning of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. During an interview with *Face the Nation* after the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld referred to Al-Jazeera as "not a perfect instrument of communication [and] obviously is a part of Iraqi Propaganda."

Despite differences in opinion by many Middle Eastern nations, and by the United States and British governments, Al-Jazeera reaches approximately 40 million viewers in the Middle East and another 15 million viewers throughout the world. In April 2003, *The Wall Street Journal* reported Al-Jazeera had approximately 300,000 viewers in the United States. This number is expected to increase as more satellite and cable companies continue to expand services. Al-Jazeera launched a sister channel—Al-Jazeera International—in March 2006, and an English language service in November 2006. The international program is expected to top nearly 50 million viewers upon its inaugural debut.

Al-Jazeera International recently signed award winning and veteran British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

interviewer Sir David Frost to anchor the news programs and added internationally known Riz Khan, formerly of the BBC and Cable News Network (CNN), to their broadcast lineup. These high-profile television journalists will likely add credibility to an organization in search of a wider audience. Broadcast options in either Arabic or English will likely bring the daily viewer total to nearly 100 million people throughout the world.

This article compares how Al-Jazeera reports news events, particularly in Iraq and in Afghanistan, to how the US news media reports the same story. How did this small station grow to such importance in the Middle-East? Selected news vignettes examine the facts of the stories and draw conclusions to Al-Jazeera's motives and the effects of its reporting on US military operations in Iraq. The intent is to use examples of reporting by both Al-Jazeera and Western media sources, compare the differences, and touch on the cultural as well as strategic influences of how messages are shaping the War of ideas. Additionally, this article offers potential ways to address this important influence issue.

Background

The birth of Al-Jazeera can be attributed to timing and a series of unfortunate events with the BBC, a French television network, and the official decree of the Emir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, in February 1996. In 1994, British educated Sheik Hamad, then Crown prince (progressive to the ruling Emir), proposed the idea of updating the state run Qatari television network to a satellite capable, independent, yet distinctly Arabic news outlet. His father, ruling Emir Sheik Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani, did not object to nor did he support this initiative.

On June 27, 1995, Sheik Hamad executed a peaceful coup and seized control of the Qatari government from his vacationing father. Both a disinterest in government affairs and acts of unaccountable corruption directly led to Sheik Khalifa's removal as Qatar's Emir. Noted Middle East media academics Mohammed El-Naway and Adel Iskander stated "Corruption prevailed in various government sectors, and the revenues from the country's oil and natural gas (resources were not used to improve the country's infrastructure." Prior to the coup, Sheik Hamad received support from other Al Thani family leaders, as well as leading tribal families in Qatar for a peaceful takeover. Sheik Hamad looked to turn his vision of an independent, yet state funded, news station into a reality by abolishing state controlled press censorship in Qatar. Although he orchestrated his new role as Qatar's ruling Emir and maintained autocratic government control, the responsibilities of office placed the Al-Jazeera initiative on the backburner in mid-1995.

The demise of the BBC sponsored Arabic News channel on the Saudi Arabian owned Orbit satellite network also played a timely and advantageous role in the birth of Al-Jazeera in January 1996. Orbit Satellite Network, a pay-for-service television station established by a Saudi prince and cousin to King Fahd in 1993, operated from Rome, Italy. The purpose to base the network outside of Saudi Arabia was "to have access to European based technicians and talent and avoid the kind of government interference that might arise if it were based in an Arab country."

The original design of the Orbit-BBC ten year contract was to bring the BBC's World News Service programming to the Middle East, in Arabic. "Before agreeing to supply Orbit with its Arabic language news channel, the BBC insisted the new channel should have the same values as the rest of the World Service." The new initiative was the first of its kind, as it would showcase Arabic journalists in a non-state controlled media environment; however, the BBC would maintain editorial control of all broadcast content. It also meant following a western style line-up of programming, which was more appealing to BBC program directors than the Arab audiences it would ultimately serve.

On March 24, 1994, the BBC began its broadcast from its West London studios. "The Arab press wrote off the whole project from the start, dubbing it the BBC's Petrodollar Channel." The initial two hours of news service per day grew to eight hours by the end of 1994. The joint endeavor began to erode shortly after the service began, with disagreements on both sides over program content, plus charges of Orbit being culturally insensitive. The BBC later revealed that "cultural insensitivities turned out to mean editing anything with which the Saudi royalty disagreed." Indeed, the intent to base Orbit in Rome, thus away from Saudi government oversight, was not a valid assumption or practice.

A major blow to BBC-Orbit relations occurred when the BBC aired a program hosted by expelled Saudi dissident, Professor Mohammed Al-Mas'ari. His strong opinions against the House of Saud, and desire to return the Saudi Kingdom to strict Islamic rule led to his exile in the UK. The program ended unexpectedly shortly after the broadcast began. The BBC immediately accused Orbit of censorship, and added that it breached the original agreement. The Saudi government, incensed by Al Mas'ari's short-lived broadcast, formally requested the British government begin his immediate deportation. The Saudis also threatened to abruptly end defense contracts worth millions of pounds, which would terminate the employment of hundreds of British citizens living in Saudi Arabia. The UK sought to deport Al-Mas'ari to Dominica; however, the British courts upheld Al-Mas'ari's appeal to remain in England. The British press sharply denounced the British government for "sacrificing Al-Mas'ari's human rights on the altar of Saudi arms deals." In the following weeks after the mysteriously aborted Al-Mas'ari broadcast, the issue subsided and the Saudi government did not carry out their original threats. Both the BBC and Orbit went back to their respective positions of bickering about program content.

The final straw occurred a few months later after the BBC decided to broadcast a documentary entitled "Death of a Principle" which chronicled: a Saudi funeral; a Filipina who testified in an interview for having been flogged for going out with male friends; and most controversially, a man about to be decapitated by a sword-wielding executioner. Although the actual moment of beheading was not shown, filming executions is illegal under Saudi law. This focus on Saudi human rights abuses sounded the death knell of a ten year joint enterprise just 18 months into the agreement. It also marked the end of a dream for Arab journalists living in London, and for Arabic viewers who briefly received an alternative to bland and often shoddy state-run television news. On April 20, 1996, the BBC's Arabic service ended on the Orbit satellite network with no offers to reconcile or restructure the agreement. "Nearly 250 Arab journalists, all of them trained by the BBC, became unemployed."

The timing of the BBC-Orbit demise could not have been better for Emir Sheik Hamad and Al-Jazeera. Though still a concept in the making based on the Emir's decree, Al-Jazeera immediately hired 120 recently unemployed, BBC trained journalists to work in Qatar. This action brought structure and rigor to the reporting content of a yet to be proven concept of independent news in the Arab world. In addition to their Al-Jazeera announcement, the Qatari Council of Ministers appointed a seven–man board of directors for Al-Jazeera, each of whom would sit for three years. Sheik Hamad bin Thamir Al Thani, then a deputy minister of information, was appointed chairman. The Emir agreed with the editorial board that Al-Jazeera would be independent of his control, and that if he were ever to break this pact, the result would be their mass resignation.

In order to bring his vision into reality, Emir Sheik Hamad pledged a one time 500 million Qatar Riyals ($137 million) sum to cover startup and running expenses for approximately five years. The board of directors estimated the network would become independently

"Reporting from Qatar…"
(CIA Factbook)

solvent, and no longer reliant on state funds after five years, based on program advertisement and exclusive video footage sales to other networks. On November 1, 1996, Al-Jazeera began to broadcast its all news format from its studio in Doha, Qatar. The initial limited-power terrestrial broadcasts reached all of Qatar, and westward across the bay to Bahrain; however, the future explosion of viewers and near immediate popularity can be attributed to another group's bad luck.

Due to a scheduling error over the Saudi-controlled Arab Satellite (Arabsat) Network, French based Canal France International aired 30 minutes of hard core pornography on a Saturday afternoon in July 1997. "Contemporary CFI broadcast data suggested that a possible 33 million people across the Middle East could have been watching, including plenty of children expecting educational material." The error, which assailed Islamic cultural sensitivities, ended CFI's programming contract with Arabsat, despite apologies and protests from French diplomats. It also paved the way for Al-Jazeera to purchase the lucrative CFI satellite slot and increase its daily programming from eight to 17 hours per day throughout the 22 Arab nations—and to the rest of the world. The independent television station from the small state of Qatar was now positioned to seriously compete with other satellite channels in a global market. Moreover, Al-Jazeera's broadcasts were (and currently remain) free to any satellite dish owner residing in the Middle East.

Perhaps the biggest break, which solidified Al-Jazeera's current standing in the Arab world, was its exclusive coverage of Operation Desert Fox in December 1998. During Operation Desert Storm in January 1991, both Arab and worldwide viewers depended on CNN to bring exclusive TV news images. During Operation Desert Fox, it was Al-Jazeera that scooped the West by providing on-the-spot, 24 hour real time news reporting from Baghdad and the rest of the world, via footage sold to Western media outlets. More importantly, this providential originated from an Arab news station, based in the Middle East, with Arabic reporters bringing the story to Arabic viewers as the events unfolded. "Al-Jazeera's graphic footage riveted Arab viewers and contributed to the massive anti-American protests that erupted across the region." No longer was the Middle East beholden to images and reports received from a "culturally tone deaf" Western media, or limited to state controlled television. In a turnabout role, Al-Jazeera sold exclusive video to Western media outlets instead of having to purchase it. Indeed, the monopoly of Western media coverage in the Middle East met a seemingly worthy contender.

During the second Palestinian (or al-Aqsa) intifada, which began in September 2000 in response to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to Al Haram Al Sharif, Al-Jazeera broadcast graphic images of intense ground level combat. The network's talk shows were full of appeals for Arab action against Israel. This was the coverage which consolidated Al-Jazeera's centrality in Arab political life. Noted Arab

media scholar Mohamed Zayani stated that "while Desert Fox was the first world event to give Al-Jazeera regional importance, the coverage of the second intifada has given Al-Jazeera a truly pan-Arab dimension." News hungry viewers could personally relate to Al-Jazeera's style of television journalism: it reported on events and issues Arab people most wanted to see, instead of what some western broadcast programmer thought was best for Arab or Muslim viewers. Al-Jazeera, as well as other new budding Arab satellite channels, seized the moment to mobilize the Arab street through acute and graphic intifada coverage in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Mohamed Zayani added, "More than any other channel, Al-Jazeera has capitalized on the importance of the Palestinian question. It has not only provided instant coverage of the events and aired detailed reports on the latest developments, shedding an unpleasant light on the practices of Israel in the Middle East, airing raw footage and images of incursions, death and demolition in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip rarely displayed by Western Media; it has also devoted many of its programs to supporting and serving the intifada, including debates, discussions, and documentaries such as *The Missing Justice* and *Palestine under Siege*. Perhaps Al-Jazeera's deputy executive director Yosri Fouda summed it up best: "it makes a hell of a difference when you say it in Arabic." Indeed, it made a difference when the reports *originated* from an independent and staunchly Arab station in the Middle East.

Prior to October 7, 2001, when Operation Enduring Freedom began in Afghanistan, Al-Jazeera remained a relatively obscure news organization in the Western world. After this date, Al-Jazeera became a household word in the West, producing coverage no other news corporation could. The outlet's rise in popularity can also be attributed to the tapes received and broadcast from Osama Bin Laden. For its part, Al-Jazeera kept exclusive broadcast rights, selling the footage to Western news outlets CNN, BBC, and a host of others at a price of $250,000 per three minute tape. Al-Jazeera film technicians affixed a dialogue box in the top right-hand corner of the television screen stating in Arabic: "exclusive video from Al-Jazeera." Further, they adorned the bottom right corner of the screen with the station's gold cartouche monogram, bringing symbolic recognition to the West. Although the major networks added their own corporate logos to the purchased video, it was Operation Enduring Freedom coverage and the signature gold monogram which made Al-Jazeera a household word in late 2001. Undeniably, all major news outlets were beholden—and scooped—by one station with exclusive media access inside Afghanistan.

Reporting based on "contextual objectivity?" (Aljazeera.net)

Reporting Bias or Responsible Journalism

Perhaps we can best view labels such as "bias" and "responsible journalism" by examining who sends and who receives a given message. Some have criticized Al Jazeer for biased reporting, while others hail them as responsible journalism, because they show the Arab side of a news story that otherwise would not be told through a western media outlet. Noted communications scholar Mohammed el-Nawawy refers to accusations of media bias as a matter of perception and "contextual objectivity." He asserts "Most networks aim to cover the news objectively, but they end up coloring it with a certain context or perspective that suits audience concerns." Arguably, Al-Jazeera understands the cultural nature of its Arab and Muslim audience, and presents news—in both content and context—which best appeals to the Arab street, and is not offered by the West. US and European media outlets can also be painted with the same brush, as most corporations select and broadcast programs based on accepted Western cultural perspectives. Mohamed Zayani, a noted Arab media scholar, observes "It would be unfair to compare Al-Jazeera to the American media partly because the latter, much like the society they serve, have their own specificity." Perhaps we can apply Zayani's statement in an inversely proportional manner, as Al-Jazeera's popularity is largely based on a defined specificity emanating from the Arab and Muslim street. Prominent Saudi newsman Jamal Khashoggi notes "Al-Jazeera has a big problem with objectivity. They must work this out. They know the taste of the Arab street, and the Arab street is anti-American." At the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, while "American media has focused on soldiers, tanks, and sandstorms, Arab TV has seized on dramatic and visceral images of blown up houses and mangled bodies." Walid Al-Omary, the Al-Jazeera correspondent in the West Bank town of Rumallah stated, "To be objective in this area is not easy, because we live here. We are part of the people here. And this situation belongs to us also, and we have our opinions."

Who is right? According to Syracuse University Professor of Media and Culture Robert Thompson,"watch CNN and Al-Jazeera and you'll quickly realize that everyone who tells a story tells it from a different point of view." Although Al-Jazeera remains free of state controlled censorship of its news content, it also received accusations of

inciting the Arab street through hatred and misunderstanding. Perhaps as a result, some label them "the "terrorist news network," "killers with cameras," "Jihad TV," "Bin Laden's Private TV channel," "a nasty little propaganda channel," and even "All Osama, All the Time." One can likely attribute such negative labels to the network's exclusive receipt of Osama Bin Laden's tapes, and promotion of hostile anti-American dialogue on its talk shows. During the first month after September 11, 2001, Al-Jazeera rebroadcast multiple excerpts from a 1998 Osama Bin Laden interview—sometimes several times a day—in which Bin Laden called on Muslims to kill Americans, Christians and Jews.

Abdullah Ibrahim al-Haj, Al-Jazeera's assistant general manager in Qatar, prided himself by touting the station's motto of "presenting the opinion and the other opinion." Critics argue this other opinion is often drummed out by a majority of anti-American, anti-Jewish, or anti-Western guests scheduled to appear on Al-Jazeera talk shows. For example, coverage of the Al-aqsa intifada promoted a perspective of solidarity among the Palestinians, but stirred hostile emotions in the Arab street. Azadeh Maveni observed, "Al-Jazeera needn't go out of its way to humanize Israeli suffering, when, in their view, Palestinians receive no such treatment on American or Israeli TV." According to Amir Taheri, Al-Jazeera successfully characterized the Al-Aqsa intifada as an issue of land and statehood, as well as a struggle between the Islamic and the Judeo-Christian worlds where "viewers could easily form the impression that the Palestinians are more truly represented by Hamas and Islamic Jihad than by Yassir Arafat's beleaguered authority." Realistically, it appears we can concurrently apply labels of biased reporting or responsible journalism to Al-Jazeera, based on who receives the message.

A Nature of Miscommunication

Senator Henry Hyde, Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, asks "how is it that the country that invented Hollywood and Madison Avenue has such trouble promoting a positive image of itself overseas?" Dr. R.S. Zaharna, associate professor of communication at American University, calls the current situation a "cultural dance of miscommunication." Dr. Zaharna cites the current paradox "between Al-Jazeera and American public diplomacy officials relate to a hidden dance described by intercultural communications scholars John Condi and Fathi Yousef." The Condi-Yousef model depicts two men of different cultures: Mr. Jones, an Englishman; and Mr. Lopez, a Mexican, who misunderstand one other's cultural and physical positions.

During the conversation Mr. Jones prefers to stand at arm's length from his conversation partner, while Mr. Lopez prefers to stand much closer. Neither is aware of each other's hidden cultural assumption about the proper distance one should observe while carrying on a conversation. As they talk, a kind of dance ensues: Mr. Lopez steps forward to decrease the distance between himself and his interlocutor; Mr. Jones steps back to increase the distance. Both feel awkward and uncomfortable, yet neither realizes why. In the end, Mr. Lopez calls Mr. Jones "aloof" and "cold", while Mr. Jones complains that Mr. Lopez is "pushy" and "aggressive." Such is the nature of miscommunication.

Dr. Zaharna adds that Western media outlets not only dance with two left feet, but are out of tune with the Arab street. She compares differences in news delivery, word usage, and their context as applied to Western and Middle Eastern cultures. While a Western style of news reporting resonates well in the United States, it does not promote positive American sentiment in the Middle East. An accepted practice of US news reporting is to present the facts with a low, steady tone, and calm demeanor. This style is largely patterned after Walter Cronkite—known as "the most trusted man in America"—for his stoic and objective reporting during events ranging from the tragic assassination of President Kennedy, to the remarkable Apollo 11 lunar landing. "Subliminally, Cronkite represented the ideal of credibility in the broadcast news content."

In contrast, Al-Jazeera is more apt to use sensationalism and emotion to present a news story. "Interviewers as well as interviewees are highly vocal and emotionally expressive." The Arab street appears to respond to emotion and passionate delivery: this style reverberates as more ardent and credible with Middle Eastern audiences. Al-Jazeera Editor-in-Chief Ibrahim Helal observes "emotions are part of the story;

Training to avoid miscommunication. (Defense Link)

the soul of the news lies in emotion. Emotion is the most important fact."

While emotion is certainly part of the news reporting equation, it can be argued the use of words in one culture may ring quite differently in another. Dr. Zaharna notes "President Bush's pronouncement that you are either with us or against us reinforced an unstated cultural dividing line between Americans on one hand, and Arabs and Muslims, on the other hand." This line of reasoning reflected positively with most Americans after 9/11, as "us" meant America and the West. However, in the Arab and Muslim world "us" may have meant other Arabs and Muslims. Dr. Zaharna observes, "These contrasting cultural assumptions of who is "us" are deep and enduring. When "us" became the "good guys" in the war against good and evil, "them" became the bad guys and even the enemy." The distinction between us and them, which appears very specific by Western standards, is an issue of conflict by Middle Eastern or Arab standards. "In this war of images and words, each side accuses the other of bias, of hiding the truth and of using loaded terms." Both Al-Jazeera and Western media outlets use words with different meanings to suit their target audiences. As an example, Al-Jazeera often referred to American officials' statements as "claims."—suggesting the response may have other meanings, or imply falsehood. In contrast, Al-Jazeera reported Iraqi officials as "saying" when reporting news events. Americans are more to the point as to what they will or will not do in the future. "In contrast, Arabs and Muslims tend to use the future tense more sparingly "in shaa Allah," an admonition that only God knows what will happen." Early US and Western news coverage of Operation Enduring Freedom largely portrayed military action in Afghanistan as strikes against terrorists and their supporters, as well as retribution for the World Trade Center attacks. Al-Jazeera showed victims bloodied by US bombs, and carried reaction from a Muslim man in Egypt who condemned the US bombing saying, "America is the maker of terrorism, and now it is now tasting its own medicine.

Opposing arguments and common viewpoints. (Defense Link)

Alternately, Al-Jazeera's Kabul correspondent Thsyeer Alouni was the only foreign TV correspondent the Taliban allowed to operate in Afghanistan. His "wild-eyed reports" alleging massive civilian casualties from US bombing fed Arab conspiracy mills, and were picked up by CNN and other news networks. The Pentagon stated most of his claims were false.

At the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, CNN referred to troops entering Iraq as "Coalition Forces," while Al-Jazeera described "invading Americans" or "invading forces." MSNBC's on-screen war headline was "Operation Iraqi Freedom" but Al-Jazeera's headline was "War on Iraq" as opposed to war *in* Iraq. An Iraqi cab driver who blew up a checkpoint was labeled as a "terrorist" by US networks but a "martyr" or "freedom fighter" by Al-Jazeera. Mohammed el-Nawawy notes the American media point of describes a suicide bomber who killed innocent soldiers in an insidious way. From the Arab media point of view, the bomber resisted invading troops through self-sacrifice, to reduce the suffering of fellow Iraqis.

On CNN, military analysts referred to Operation Iraqi Freedom as a war of liberation. On Al-Jazeera, "The war was not an act of liberation, but of "occupation." Media analysts pointed out CNN and other Western Media outlets provided human interest stories on soldiers or their units, while Al-Jazeera updated the war's death toll, and defended its right to report on the "ugly face of war." In May 2003, Delinda Hanley described two wars going on in Iraq. One is a gripping made for TV show, starring brave US and British troops putting their lives on the line to bring freedom to oppressed Iraqis. Little blood is spilled on camera. Soldiers pass food out to starving Iraqi civilians and prisoners. Homesick and on the edge, these idealistic servicemen and women remain confident that they will soon win this just war and return to their families. The other war is waged by Iraqis, desperate to protect their homes and their ancient land against US and British invaders. Bombed buildings, smoke and chaos are the backdrops for this war. Its stars are wounded and screaming Iraqi women and children, captured or terrified Iraqis—and yes, US and British Soldiers.

Unlike the US or Western news outlets, Al-Jazeera seemingly focused on the most terrifying aspects of the war. Jihad Ali Ballout, spokesman for Al-Jazeera stated, "Al-Jazeera is just trying to do its job, like everyone else covering the war in Iraq. We don't decide what our viewers should or should not see. War is innately ugly." While the network brought the more distressing aspects of the war to satellite television, it did not

bring all aspects—as it claimed—to the Arab street.

Selected news vignettes provide insights into the contrasting patterns of news reported the same day by both Al-Jazeera and Western media. The following illustrations refer to the combat effectiveness of an Iraqi Army Division, a car bombing incident in a Baghdad market place, the initiation of a northern front by US Paratroopers, and the historic toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad. Each highlights the different aspects of selected news stories.

- On Monday, March 23, 2003, Coalition forces announced the surrender of the 51st Division and its commander. Al-Jazeera's Basra correspondent interviewed the general, who said his troops were in Basra defending the city. In reality, Coalition forces had entered Basra and rendered the 51st Division as combat ineffective. Al-Jazeera continued to broadcast the interview and officer's claim throughout the day.

- On Wednesday, March 26, 2003 a bomb exploded in a Baghdad market place. CNN's Nic Roberston reported chaos and anger in the district. CNN purchased video from Al-Jazeera showing a burned-out car and men carrying a body away from the scene in a blanket. In the backdrop, Nic Roberston stated, "The Iraqi government is saying this is an indication that coalition forces are targeting civilians." The scene then changes to the Iraqi Minister of Information (in English for greater effect) saying, "They are killing innocent people." The Al-Jazeera coverage used similar but lengthier clips of the Minister of Information briefing, plus interviews with Baghdad residents, and more footage of Baghdad streets with a close-up shot of a puddle of blood. At no time during the story did the reporter question the bomb's "American" origin."

- On Thursday, March 27, 2003, CNN reported American paratroopers conducted a combat jump near Kirkuk to open the northern front in Iraq. On Al-Jazeera, a little Iraqi girl in a pink sweater stared out a window from her Baghdad hospital bed. Later that day Al-Jazeera aired the same footage from

Strategic communicators. (Defense Link)

the market bombing the day before, adding images of a hospitalized boy with bandaged feet. Reporter Diyar al-Omari added additional images of victims lying dead in the street, and warned "this could be a sign of the ugliness of this war, as opposed to what Washington said was going to be a clean war that wasn't supposed to target civilians." Al-Jazeera did not report on the paradrop near Kirkuk, or discuss the importance of opening a northern front, at any time on March 27.

- On Wednesday, April 9, 2003, most US networks provided live coverage of the toppling of Saddam's statue in al Fardus square. Images of cheering Iraqi citizens and tired US Soldiers appeared for most of the day. In contrast, Al-Jazeera gave little coverage to this historic event. Instead, "Al-Jazeera conveyed the chaos of the streets, broadcasting images of people both celebrating and looting. (Al-Jazeera) also showed the anguish of Iraqi civilians: images from Basra of a wounded boy, his face partially burned off."

While Al-Jazeera used a specific approach to cover these events, their apparently negative perspective did not consider the broader context, nor the reality of these situations. If a media outlet provides the viewer only a partial picture, it introduces a form of bias. Without the complete image, the audience cannot make a valid self-determination of what occurs in the broadcast. Instead, the viewer gets a censored, less than objective point of view.

Several Middle Eastern media analysts are quick to point out the benefits, as well as the drawbacks, of the "Al-Jazeera" effect on the Arab street. Mohammed el-Nawawy observes, "in Arab eyes, Al-Jazeera is not affiliated with any specific Arab government and has not sided with any particular Arab regime. This in and of itself makes people trust the network more." Fouad Ajami, distinguished professor of Near Eastern studies at Johns Hopkins University, "luridly described the station in an influential New York Times Magazine essay as a cesspool of anti-American hate that deliberately fans the flames of Muslim outrage." Newsweek International's Farced Zakaria stated Al-Jazeera "fills its airwaves with crude appeals to Arab nationalism, anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism, and religious fundamentalism." Amer Taheri noted the emergence of a new middle class in the Arab world that "is looking for an alternative to both the theo-paranoia of the Islamists and the corrupt lethargy of the ruling cliques. Taheri goes on to say "the democratic left, the democratic right and the moderate center are never represented on Al-Jazeera."

Thus, the nature of miscommunication is a product of both who sends and receives the message. "Paradoxes within one's own culture are often overlooked while paradoxes within other cultures are glaringly obvious and demand explanation." Without question, the US must address present and future implications of our messages, in order to win the war of ideas in the "Long War Against Terrorism."

Strategic Implications

Author Max Boot recently observed, "US troops in Iraq are slowly winning

the war on the ground, even as they're losing the public relations battle back home." Critics state we are losing the information war in Iraq and Afghanistan; however, few take the time to define what they mean. Ironically, policy makers often use the call for "strategic communications" improperly: the plural "communications" refers to hardware used to send a message. The correct term "strategic communication" describes a focused message or set of themes, which articulates a defined position.

As a result of the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR), Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England directed a Strategic Communication (SC) focus study. At present, the US does not possess a national strategy which outlines ends, ways, and means—using all elements or instruments of national power—for SC. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld says "Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today's media age, but for the most part, we--our government, the media or our society in general—have not." Deputy Secretary of Defense England's direction for a follow-up SC study is a step in the right direction; however, DOD should have an inclusive role within the larger context of the interagency process. The issue of Strategic Communication is not solely a DOD problem, nor should it be limited to a DOD viewpoint or solution. Part of the current problem likely stems from well intended, yet disparate efforts by many US government officials, all of whom want to properly convey national policy and interests in the Middle East. Dr. R. S. Zaharna suggests "the US has not tailored its messages to address the [Arab or Muslim] audience's cultural and political sensibilities." The US Department of State (DOS) should take the lead in this important initiative, turning to respected Middle Eastern scholars and journalists for the Arab or Muslim perspective. Ultimately, such efforts should lead to development of a National Strategic Communication Strategy, under DOS sponsorship. Moreover, the US strategy must focus on reaching out to the emerging middle class moderates in the Middle East through engagement with Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya and other emerging satellite channels. Dr. Shibley Telhami of the University of Maryland notes, "we have to help the moderates rally behind a global vision that would give hope. There is despair in the Middle East. Without hope we are not going to be able to defeat the militants." In the war of ideas, the militants or terrorists provide no alternative to peace and democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Conclusion

The proliferation of satellite television service in the Middle East continues to reach nearly every household and public meeting place. Competition, from Al-Arabiya and others, means Al-Jazeera no longer holds the monopoly of satellite television viewer ratings it had prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom. According to November 2005 Ipsos-Stat TV research poll, "Al Arabiya is the number one watched satellite news channel in Saudi Arabia and in Iraq." Despite the drop in viewer ratings, Al-Jazeera is still funded, and remains free from Emir Sheik Hamad's editorial control. In over ten years of broadcast experience, the "Al-Jazeeraphenomenon" continues to change the complexion of the public debate in the Arab world, and successfully promotes the idea that an independent news station can endure in the Middle East.

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